



Los Angeles County
Department of Regional Planning

Planning for the Challenges Ahead



Jon Sanabria
Acting Director of Planning

December 10, 2009

TO: Leslie G. Bellamy, Chair
Wayne Rew, Vice Chair
Esther L. Valadez, Commissioner
Harold V. Helsley, Commissioner
Pat Modugno, Commissioner

FROM: Susan Tae, Supervising Regional Planner
Land Divisions Section

SLT

SUBJECT: PROJECT NO. 04-075-(5) "Skyline Ranch"
GENERAL PLAN AMENDMENT CASE NO. 200900009
VESTING TENTATIVE TRACT MAP NO. 060922
CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT CASE NO. 04-075
CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT CASE NO. 200900121
OAK TREE PERMIT CASE NO. 200700021
HIGHWAY REALIGNMENT CASE NO. 200900001

DECEMBER 16, 2009; AGENDA ITEM NO. 6 a, b, c, d, e, f, g

*** SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION ***

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The project, known as Skyline Ranch, proposes a clustered residential development of 1,260 single-family residential lots as well as a 12-acre public park, nine private parks, an 11.6-acre elementary school lot, 25 open space lots and additional public facility (debris basin and booster pump station) lots on 2,173 gross acres. The project includes Class II bike lanes within Skyline Ranch Road as well as network of privately-maintained paseos and trails and one public trail.

The project was originally filed with a vesting tentative tract map for the subdivision along with a Conditional Use Permit ("CUP") for onsite grading, urban and nonurban hillside management, density-controlled development and for a temporary materials processing facility proposed onsite during construction within the project site. The project also includes an oak tree permit for the removal of one oak tree (nonheritage), and a highway realignment for Whites Canyon Road to be realigned through the project site as Skyline Ranch Road.

A Draft Environmental Impact Report ("EIR") has been prepared pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) reporting requirements. Impacts to Visual Quality,

Cumulative Traffic, Noise, Air Quality, Solid Waste Disposal, Law Enforcement Services and Global Climate Change were identified as significant impacts that cannot be mitigated to less than significant with project mitigation measures. The Draft EIR was circulated, and the formal public comment period as noticed, ended on September 10, 2009.

UPDATED ANALYSIS

Since staff's memo to your Commission dated December 3, 2009, the following are additional updates and information received related to the project issues raised.

Alternate Cross-Section

Staff is continuing to coordinate with Public Works on the recommendation regarding alternate cross-sections. The applicant in the meantime, has provided the additional justification (attached).

Oak Tree Permit

Updated information has been received from the applicant and was forwarded to the Los Angeles County Forester/Fire Warden ("Forester") on October 13, 2009. Updated recommended conditions have not yet been received from the Forester for the one oak tree removal, but staff understands that the recommendations will likely reflect proposed mitigation of 10:1 (10 mitigation trees). While the oak tree was technically not a heritage oak tree when the arborist's report was prepared, given the steady growth of the oak tree and to avoid additional analysis if the oak tree eventually grew to heritage size, the arborist has recommended 10 mitigation trees, and the Forester concurs.

The arborist also recommended 24" box trees as replacement trees for the oak removal, but the Forester instead recommends 15-gallon trees to better ensure that the trees survive replanting.

Draft conditions will be prepared for the oak tree permit once the formal recommendations are received from the Forester.

ADDITIONAL CORRESPONDENCE

Additional correspondence has been received from the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy ("SMMC"), and Los Angeles County Department of Public Works ("Public Works") (attached).

SMMC, in their letter dated October 5, 2009 (received December 7, 2009), provided comments regarding alternatives in the Draft EIR, including the need for a Reduced Project Alternative C that avoids filling any of the unnamed drainage in the southern part of the site, provides between 950 and 1,000 units, and that should be designated as the Environmentally Superior Alternative in the Final EIR. SMMC also provided comments

DECEMBER 16, 2009 SUPPLEMENTAL HEARING MEMO

recommending all undeveloped land be dedicated in fee simple to a public park agency, funding also be provided for open space management (with any film revenue to habitat restoration), and that the Mountains Restoration Conservation Authority is suitable to manage the open space property with filming activity.

Correspondence from Public Works dated November 10, 2009, include recommendations for coordination with Sulphur Springs School District regarding traffic circulation plans for the school site, and City of Santa Clarita review of the Draft EIR as well as other comments regarding proposed mitigation measures.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the issues that remain outstanding, staff recommends a continuance to a date certain. For the next continued hearing, staff will also be preparing the Final EIR with Findings of Fact and Statement of Overriding Considerations, and draft findings and conditions for approval for your Commission's consideration.

Recommended Motion: I move that the Regional Planning Commission continue the public hearing to a date certain in order for the final technical clearances on the subdivision to be received; for the Interdepartmental Engineering Committee to meet and forward its recommendation to this body; and for the preparation of the Final Environmental Impact Report with Findings of Fact and Statement of Overriding Considerations, and draft findings and conditions for the project.

SMT:st

12/10/2009

Attachment: Alternate Cross-Section burden of proof
Additional Correspondence

Alternate Cross-Section Burden of Proof

Project No. 04-075

Vesting Tentative Tract Map No. 060922

Skyline Ranch Project

County Code Section 21.24.090 regulates right-of-way and roadway widths for proposed land divisions. The cross-sections depicted in County Code Section 21.24.090 that are designated as "alternate" shall not apply if the advisory agency finds that the use of such alternate cross-sections would not be in keeping with the design and improvement of adjoining highways or streets.

As Required by County Code Section 21.24.090, the Proposed Alternate Cross-Sections are in Keeping with the Design and Improvement of Adjoining Highways and Streets Because:

For interior 64-foot right-of-way, 60-foot right-of-way, and 58-foot right-of-way local streets, the project proposes to switch the location of the 6-foot landscaped parkway and 6-foot sidewalk depicted in the traditional cross-section.

With the proposed alternate cross-section, the sidewalk will be adjacent to the roadway. The house will be 20 feet from the sidewalk as depicted in the traditional cross-section; however, 14 feet of private front yard will be provided between the house and the landscaped parkway as opposed to the traditional cross-section, which provides 20 feet of private front yard. With the alternate cross-section, it will still appear as if a 20-foot front yard is provided, except that 6 feet of the open area between the house and the sidewalk will be landscaped parkway. 40 feet of roadway will be provided, as would also be provided with a traditional cross-section.

Because alternate cross-sections are proposed only for interior local streets, all collector roads and secondary highways that connect the new community to existing and planned neighborhoods and highways will be developed with traditional cross-sections. The alternate cross-section design will be used only on interior streets where homes will front. It is in no way incongruous for the traditional cross-sections to be applied to adjoining collector streets and

highways where no homes will take access. Furthermore, the proposed interior local streets where alternate cross-sections are proposed do not adjoin existing or planned adjacent development. Accordingly, the use of alternate cross-sections would be in keeping with the design and improvement of adjoining highways and streets.

SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY

RAMIREZ CANYON PARK
5750 RAMIREZ CANYON ROAD
MALIBU, CALIFORNIA 90265
PHONE (310) 589-3200
FAX (310) 589-3207



October 5, 2009

Los Angeles County Regional Planning Commission
Department of Regional Planning
320 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, California 90012

Skyline Ranch Project DEIR Comments
Project No. 04-075 - Tract Map 060922 - SCH No. 2004101090

Dear Planning Commission Members:

The Cruzan Mesa area is an important component of the multiple mountain ranges along the northern edge of the upper Santa Clara River that are ecologically tied to the Rim of the Valley Trail Corridor zone. The Conservancy's December 6, 2004 Notice of Preparation comments were not acknowledged in the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) so they are hereby incorporated by reference.

Without question any development approved on the subject property will result in unavoidable significant adverse biological impacts. One of those significant impacts will be the loss of hundreds of acres of habitat and a portion of a blueline drainage riparian system. The DEIR refers to this canyon as the unnamed drainage in the southern part of the site.

It is incumbent on the County to make reasonable attempts to reduce ecological impacts if feasible alternatives exist. Reduced Project Alternative B was a good start at such a goal because it preserves one hundred percent of the unnamed drainage in the southern part of the site. However, the alternative is not feasible because it loads too much traffic onto Whites Canyon Road and Bakerton Avenue. The DEIR analysis does not flat out say that this traffic configuration is physically not workable. However, it would result in substantial adverse traffic impacts to several neighborhoods. Reduced Project Alternative A has too many strikes against it in regards to significant impacts to be feasible. Both alternatives produce secondary significant impacts and both are designed to be doomed politically.

The DEIR is deficient for not including an adequate range of feasible reduced development alternatives. The Final EIR must include the following alternative project for the FEIR to not be deficient.

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Need for Reduced Project Alternative C

This project should be called the Reduced Project Alternative C. The project would be exactly the same as the proposed project in regards to including the Whites Canyon Extension to Sierra Highway. However the footprint of this alternative project would differ from the proposed project by not filling any of unnamed drainage in the southern part of the site other than to the extent necessary to achieve the desired Whites Canyon Extension. It would thus follow the same eastern boundary of the Reduced Project Alternative B. This alternative project footprint provides significant avoidance of a blueline drainage and it meets all of the project objectives.

The alternative project would also provide between 950 and 1,000 units of the same size in the proposed project. It would avoid the need for one of the offsite grading areas. This alternative cannot be dismissed as infeasible simply because it does not provide enough housing to prevent additional housing from occurring further into undeveloped land on other properties in the future. There is no way to define that number and in any case it could then be construed that the whole site should be developed.

The northeastern bulge in the proposed project that fills in a long section of the unnamed blueline stream canyon was conveniently put in to add extra units. If Reduced Project Alternative B is physically feasible, then the Conservancy proposed Reduced Project Alternative C is also physically feasible. The fill that would have gone into the above described northeastern bulge of units can be used for the Whites Canyon Extension. If Alternative B is not physically feasible then that confirms that the DEIR range of alternatives is inadequate. Alternatives must be physically feasible.

In the FEIR, the above described Reduced Project Alternative C must supplant Reduced Project Alternative B as the environmentally superior alternative. Reduced Project Alternative B is not a feasible alternative (because of traffic circulation) and therefore not a valid alternative. The range of FEIR alternatives must be expanded accordingly.

Fee Simple Open Space Dedication a Condition of Grading Permits or Map Recordation

We urge the Commission to require that all of the undeveloped land located outside of the private lots and public rights-of-ways be dedicated in fee simple to a public park agency. Any place where fuel modification is required, the HOA should retain a permanent easement to allow brush clearance consistent with written Los Angeles County Fire Department requirements. To adequately mitigate the project impacts to natural land,

that complete fee simple dedication should occur as a precondition to the issuance of any grading permits or map recordation.

That open space dedication should include all of the site including the area being used for movie production. The entity managing the open space including the Cruzan Mesa vernal pools needs to control all portions of the property that can affect the pools. In addition it is better to have unified management of the open space by a public agency with the public's interest at the forefront.

We concur with the County staff recommendation that the County Biologist work the future land management agency to come up with a range of acceptable filming activities and footprints. The Conservancy supports responsible filming on public lands and makes all efforts to accommodate the needs of the film industry on its multiple properties.

The Conservancy defers to the County if the Department of Parks and Recreation wants to take the land. If not, the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) is the obvious choice. In the case of the nearby Spring Canyon tract open space dedication, the Department of Parks and Recreation was not assertive about making sure a permanent maintenance funding source was built into the project approval. If the Department is not definitely and aggressively willing to make that request for permanent maintenance funding to prevent the open space maintenance burden from falling on the rest of the County tax payers, we urge the Commission to require that a permanent funding source and title to the open space go to the MRCA.

Open Space Management Funding

The minimum 1500-acre open space preserve that will result from a project approval on the subject property is the mitigation center piece for a project that proposes over 20 million cubic yards of grading. For that mitigation center piece to provide a quality public experience and to continue to improve in ecological condition, a permanent funding source is imperative.

Filming may produce a variable stream of funding for the management agency but a consistent funding source not dependent on resource disturbance is the only prudent mechanism to protect the public interest. Filming revenue is better suited to go towards habitat restoration.

That open space maintenance funding must be in the form of a Landscape Maintenance District or a Community Facilities District. No other mechanism provides an adequate guarantee to the public. In contrast HOAs can delay funding.

How much funding is necessary? We throw the question back to the Planning Commission. How important is it for public users of the 1500-plus acres of open space to have well maintained trails, restrooms, trash pick up, and ranger patrols? The Commission gets one shot at it in its recommendation to the Board of Supervisors, and we urge the Commission to require a dollar amount that guarantees a safe and fulfilling public experience.

If the MRCA were to patrol the land with its sworn law enforcement rangers at current rates, \$35,000 annually would provide ten weekly hours of ranger time devoted to the site for 52 weeks a year. To continue that level of service an inflation adjustor must be included.

If porta-potty restrooms are to be included the monthly rental and cleaning cost would also need to be added with an inflation adjustor.

We also recommend an initial one time start up payment of \$20-30,000 for adequate gates, fencing, signage, trail refurbishment, focused noxious weed control, and trash clean up.

Suitability of the MRCA to Manage the Property

The MRCA manages over 60,000 acres of open space including approximately 8,000 acres in the upper Santa Clara River watershed. To use the MRCA for maintenance is a simple turn key operation.

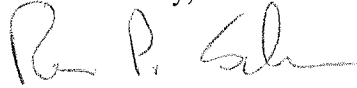
The MRCA rangers are sworn peace officers with wildland fire training and naturalist training. The MRCA has six staff ecologists to address management and restoration issues. In addition the MRCA has a full time habitat restoration crew currently doing long term restoration in the Elsmere, Whitney, Pico and Soledad Canyon tributaries of the upper Santa Clara River. The MRCA manages the Tierra Rejada vernal pool in Moorpark with the Endangered Riverside fairy shrimp. The MRCA staff includes a biologist certified to survey for this species in the years the vernal pool adequately fills.

The MRCA also has staff devoted to filming activities. Filming occurs on many MRCA-owned and managed properties on a year-round basis.

Regional Planning Commission
Skyline Ranch Project DEIR Comments- Project No. 04-075
October 5, 2009
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Please address any questions to Paul Edelman of our staff at the above address and by phone at (310) 589-3200 ext. 128.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "R. P. Schaffer", written in a cursive style.

RONALD P. SCHAFER
Chairperson



GAIL FARBER, Director

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

"To Enrich Lives Through Effective and Caring Service"

900 SOUTH FREMONT AVENUE
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ADDRESS ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO:
P.O. BOX 1460
ALHAMBRA, CALIFORNIA 91802-1460

November 10, 2009

IN REPLY PLEASE
REFER TO FILE: LD-1

TO: Paul McCarthy
Department of Regional Planning

Attention: Michele Bush

FROM:  Steve Burger
Land Development Division
Department of Public Works

**DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT (DEIR)
SKYLINE RANCH
PROJECT NO. 04-075
STATE CLEARINGHOUSE NO. 2004101090**

We reviewed the DEIR for the Skyline Ranch project. The project includes residential lots, an approximately 11-acre elementary school site, 10 lots for park areas, 13 debris basins, 4 water tank/booster pumps station, and 25 open space lots.

The following comments are for your consideration:

Services-Traffic

The DEIR shall address the following comments, which were included in our September 18, 2008, letter. Please note the milestone indicated in the September 18, 2008, letter has been revised per comments below.

1. We recommend the project's developer work with the Sulphur Springs Union School District to develop traffic circulation plans and drop-off/pick-up procedures for the proposed school. If possible, we recommend implementing a one-way, counter-clockwise, on-site traffic circulation for any valet service and restricting any site access from Skyline Ranch Road. The traffic circulation plan should include informational packets containing the approved drop-off/pick-up procedures as well as brochures on trip reduction strategies such as carpooling and transit services to minimize traffic generation in the area (the brochures should have specific average vehicle ridership goals for students and staff

members). We also recommend the plan include a mechanism for enforcement and levying of noncompliance penalties. The traffic circulation informational packets and the detailed school site plan shall be reviewed and approved by Public Works prior to the issuance of the Certificate of Occupancy.

2. Caltrans should be consulted for any possible California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) impacts to the freeway system in the area. Therefore, we ask that you provide Caltrans with a copy of the report so they have an opportunity to review it prior to public circulation. Any written comments received from Caltrans should be submitted to Public Works and included in the DEIR.
3. The City of Santa Clarita should review this document to determine whether they concur with the study's findings of the potential CEQA impacts within its jurisdiction. Any written comments from the City should be submitted to Public Works and included in the DEIR.

If you have any further questions regarding traffic comments, please contact Courtney Sweeney at (626) 300-4721 or by e-mail at csweeney@dpw.lacounty.gov.

Services-Road/Access

We agree with the mitigation summaries relating to the roadways within the County as shown in the DEIR. In addition, the DEIR should disclose the following:

1. Bike lanes are being proposed along Skyline Ranch Road.
2. Approval of the conceptual striping plans and related road plans and permits will be required by Public Works for work within the County's jurisdiction.

If you have any questions regarding road comments, please contact Sam Richards at (626) 458-4921 or by e-mail at srich@dpw.lacounty.gov.

Services-Water/Sewer

Water

1. Santa Clarita Water District is the water purveyor for this area.
2. The DEIR should address the adequacy of the water supply to ensure the capability of water for the project.

3. Submit Will Serve letter from water purveyor(s) that meets the minimum domestic flow requirements as well as fire flow/fire hydrants requirements to Public Works' Land Development Division for review and approval.

Sewer

Sewer area study, PC12109AS, dated April 28, 2009, was approved per Mitigation Agreement No. 20090435108 for sewer line upgrade in the City of Santa Clarita.

If you have any questions regarding water and sewer comments, please contact Tony Khalkhali at (626) 458-4921 or by e-mail at tkhalkhali@dpw.lacounty.gov.

Hazards–Others

1. Should any operation within the subject project include the construction, installation, modification, or removal of underground storage tanks, industrial waste treatment or disposal facilities, and/or storm water treatment facilities, Public Works' Environmental Programs Division must be contacted for required approvals and operating permits.
2. Food service establishments may be required to provide a grease treatment device and will be subject to review and approval by Public Works' Environmental Programs Division.
3. All development and redevelopment projects, which fall into one of the Standard Urban Stormwater Mitigation Plan project types, characteristics, or activities, must obtain the Standard Urban Stormwater Mitigation Plan approval by the appropriate agency.

If you have any questions regarding the environmental comments, please contact Corey Mayne at (626) 458-3524 or by e-mail at cmayne@dpw.lacounty.gov.

If you have any other questions or require additional information, please contact Toan Duong at (626) 458-4945 or by e-mail at tduong@dpw.lacounty.gov.